Enhancing the Participation of Community-based Organizations (CBOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Democratic Governance in Bangladesh

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Democratic Governance and Local Development: Experience from Grassroots Citizens Organisations

Citizens' Engagement in Delivering SDGs at Local Level
Learnings, Lessons and Recommendations

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❑ **All Development is Local**. The SDG aspiration is to leave no one behind in the design and implementation of developmental praxis. If no one is to be left behind, geographically-climatologically- spatially challenged localities must also not be left behind

❑ Accordingly, in view of this, effectiveness of public delivery of services at the local level, in vulnerable areas, is key to successful implementation of SDGs by *Leaving No One Behind*

❑ This understanding is what motivates all the activities implemented as part of this project which is geared towards *SDG localisation* in Bangladesh

❑ The project seeks to strengthen delivery of the SDGs at the local level by (a) stimulating **continuing engagement** between state and non-state actors towards higher efficacy of delivery of SDG-related public services, (b) contributing to **strengthening stakeholder participation and voice** and (c) promoting **accountability and transparency** in delivery of public services at the local level

Project Implementation Areas

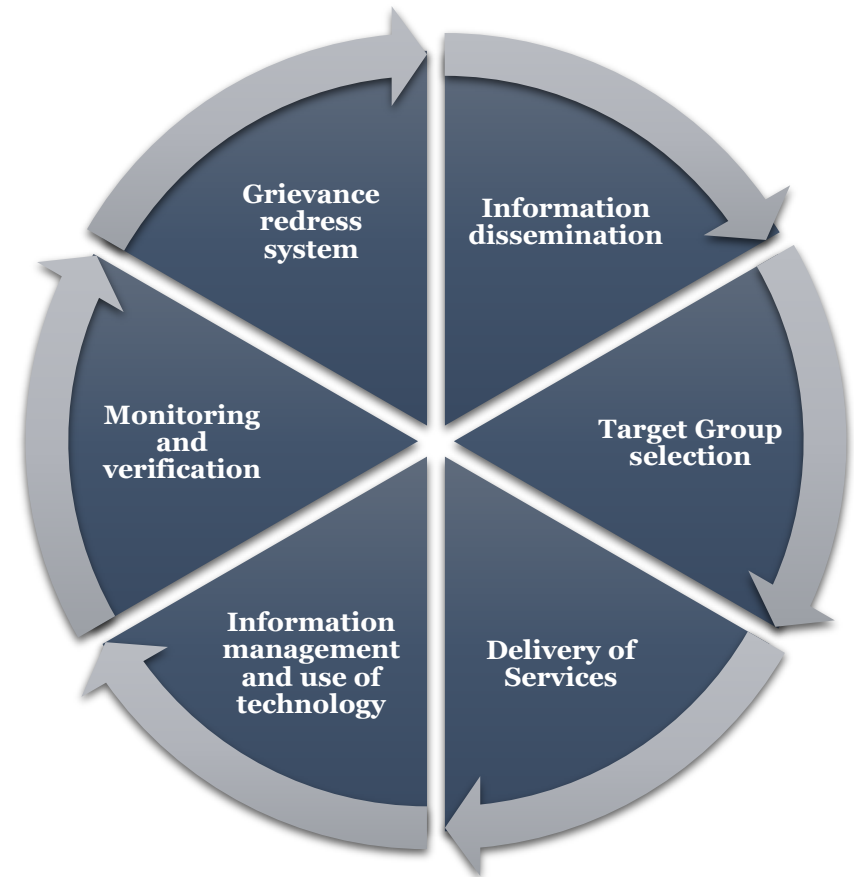*13 most disadvantaged Districts/Upazilas in Bangladesh according to:*

➢ Poverty levels and density of marginalised people

➢ Natural Disaster proneness

➢ Geographic Remoteness

➢ Most challenged in terms of public services delivery
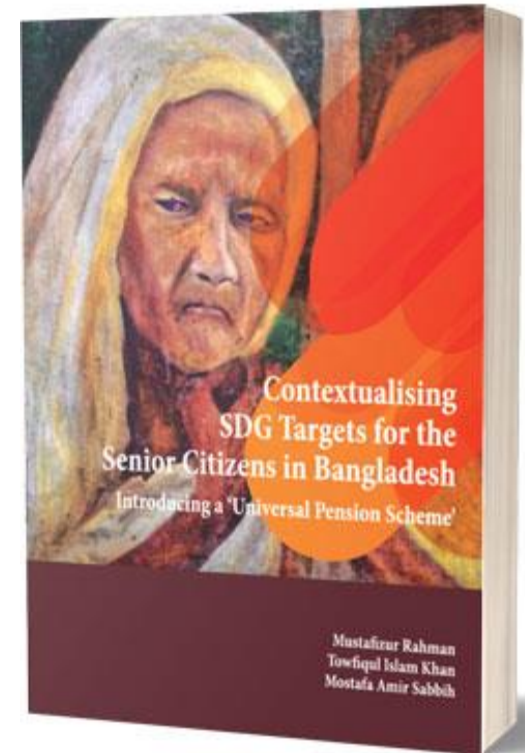
Focus of Activities under the Project

- Organisation of **stakeholder consultations** in each of the selected 13 areas involving government officials in local administration, institutions involved in providing various public services, local elected bodies and non-state actors including CBOs, CSOs, NGOs and the media

- Development of a *Social Audit Framework*, by taking a common but differentiated approach, to assess the quality and effectiveness of public services delivered in the selected areas. Key components of the framework are depicted in the Figure

Figure: Social Audit Framework

- Grievance redress system
- Information dissemination
- Target Group selection
- Delivery of Services
- Information management and use of technology
- Monitoring and verification

❑ **Training of local partner organisations** to conduct social audit in light of the Framework developed under the project with a view to build capacities for downstream engagement with grassroots organisations.

❑ **Undertaking research studies** to come up with recommendations towards better public service delivery, both at local and national levels. Some of these are: Enhancing **Efficacy of Social Protection Programmes** in Bangladesh, Development of a **Framework for Introducing National Universal Pension Scheme** in Bangladesh and Assessing efficacy of **safety net programmes** and **labour market adjustments** in view of the pandemic

Contextualising SDG Targets for the Senior Citizens in Bangladesh
Introducing a 'Universal Pension Scheme'

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A few general observations gleaned in light of implementing the various activities in the 13 target upazilas as part of the project:

On the part of Service Delivery Actors

❑ *There is a genuine effort on the part of the Government to raise effectiveness of service delivery at the local level.* These are reflected in:

➢ Prioritisation of SDGs (**39+1** target with the latter target to be prioritised and decided locally at District/Upazila level). Development of the *Natore Model* of Localisation of the SDGs.

➢ A **new breed of government officials** working at the district and upazila levels who are more hands on and committed to work for raising effectiveness of services delivered at the local level, and who are receptive to **new ideas** and ready to try **innovative practices**

➢ Local level officials increasingly **more open to interacting and engaging** with non-state actors even when this means subjecting themselves to accountability to citizens

On the part of Non-State Actors

➢**Growing expectation and increasing demand on the part of citizens** for better, timely and more effective service delivery, by holding local level government officials and elected representatives responsible and accountable

➢**More openness on the part of NSAs** to engage with local level institutions and concerned government officials, not as adversaries but as partners

Shadow of the Pandemic

➢Because of the pandemic, there was a **sense of urgency** on all involved stakeholders: on the part of concerned service-recipients for receiving timely delivery of services and on the part of government officials and institutions delivering various safety net programmes and services and local government representatives

From the perspective of Project interventions

➢ **Dialogues and consultations**, backed by local knowledge and held in an environment of constructive engagement, **create a motivation for joint actions** which is critically important for raising effectiveness of public service delivery at local level with participation of all involved

➢ **Platforms facilitating engagement** between public service providers and citizens could play a critically important role in narrowing trust deficit, giving voice, ensuring accountability and promoting transparency in the delivery of public services

➢ **A Framework of Social Audit** provides a powerful tool to ensure accountability in public service delivery at local level against which success and failure of service delivery can be assessed and measured

Project Achievements

- ***Discourse:*** Graduation of the discourse on local level service delivery from one of **'between providers and recipient'** to one that is **'voice-empowered and rights based'**

- ***Delivery of services:*** Services considered not as a **unidirectional delivery** (government agents to service recipients) but an **inclusive process** that involves all concerned stakeholders

- ***Citizens' Empowerment:*** Through workshops and other project activities **awareness of marginalised groups was raised as regards demands, rights, and voice and accountability**

- ***Effectiveness of services:*** Effectiveness measured not just by the services delivered but from the vantage point of social audit tool developed under the project, **with upstream, midstream and downstream components,** as an instrument of accountability, transparency and good governance in SDG-related public service delivery

❑ Based on trainings imparted by the CPD, partner CSOs and CBOs conducted a total of **26 social audits in 13 districts**, in two phases. Concerning **six SDG-oriented services**: VGD, Food Relief (**SDG 1**), Agriculture services (**SDG 2**), Health services (**SDG 3**), Education services (**SDG 4**), Water and Sanitation services (**SDG 6**), Training and Credit services for Youth (**SDG 8**).

❑ The findings of these social audits were shared with local administration, local government representatives, media and other interested stakeholders through **26 public hearings**. A number of possible solutions emerged through this program.

Socially Accountable Social Protection Services

Thanks to social audit and public hearings on VGD by CBOs

- LAs and LGs disseminate information about various services available at local level by undertaking various activities in Nilphamari and Gaibandha
- LGs follow proper beneficiary **selection guideline** in Rangpur
- LGs hang potential and preliminary **list of beneficiaries** in union parishad in Nilphamari and Gaibandha
- The case of inclusion of **ineligible people** has been reduced in Gaibandha
- Beneficiaries are getting the services with **actual quantity**, without hassle and additional **transaction cost** in Rangpur and Gaibandha
- **LA's visits** and field level presence have increased

Socially Accountable Agriculture Services

After the public hearing on Agriculture services

- The Project Coordinator of the local partner in Kishoreganj was **included** in **Upazila Agricultural Committee**

Owing to regular consultation of District Network with local Agricultural Offices

- A total of **600** and **230** severely affected CBOs (farmers) in **flood** affected areas received seeds and fertilisers for free as **subsidy** and **rehabilitation** in Jamalpur and Gaibandha respectively
- **3** CBO members affected by Cyclone 'Amphan' received 20 kg fertilizer, 5 types of seeds and Tk. 500 for cultivating their land and maintaining other costs as **rehabilitation** in Satkhira
- **46** CBOs (cattle farmers) were included in the **incentive** (Tk. 4,600 to 10,000) list of Upazila livestock office in Nilphamari
- **87** CBOs received different agricultural **inputs** in Netrokona

Socially Accountable Health Services

Thanks to social audit and public hearings on Community Clinics by CBOs with Upazila Administration and LGs:

- **2** community clinics have **resumed their operation** in Sirajganj
- Health staffs are **regularly attending** their respective CCs in Netrokona
- In Sandwip of Chattogram on time presence of doctors and health staff has improved **Irregularities such as getting money from patients** for medicines have come to an end. On duty CC staffs now **behave well** with the patients. FWAs now **regularly visit** wards and villages and provide health services and consultation

Socially Accountable Education Services

Thanks to public hearing by CBOs with primary school teachers, SMC members, parents, Upazila education officers and local government representatives:

- Teachers have started to **attend** and **teach** regularly in Roumari and Jamalpur
- Physical punishment inflicted by teachers is no more there in Roumari and Jamalpur
- Parents now **regularly visit** schools which has improved teacher-student performance
- In Roumari, Kurigram Education Officers now **regularly visit** schools in Char areas. Parent and SMC **meetings** are regularly held. The system of **temporary/alternative teachers** has been abolished

Socially Accountable Local Infrastructure

CBO members applied the learnings from training on Social Accountability and Public Finance Management tools and raised their demands in union Ward Shavas and budget discussions. This has contributed to:

- **Construction** of **1.5 km** long road from Khursimul to Baladarshi. The work is complete while construction of **4** other (3 paved, 1 non-paved) roads are almost complete in Netrokona
- **Construction** of **one km** long road in Beatirchar in Kishoreganj
- **Construction** of **half km** long and **repair and renovation** **one km** long roads in Sandwip
- **Construction** of **115 feet** long wooden **culvert** in Jamalpur

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Socially Accountable Training and Credit Services for Youth

- As a result of regular CBO consultations with LAs under the project, Upazila Women Affairs Division (UWAD) has provided **tailoring training** to **4** disadvantaged youths out of 11 applicants (from the CBOs). Each of the beneficiary youth has also received **low-interest loans** of Tk. 15 thousand at the end of the training in Satkhira

- As a result of discussions as regards need for vocational/technical training for disadvantaged women in the locality, UWAD had organised **skills development training** for **30** women of Phulchari and Gozaria union of Gaibandha

Following lessons may be drawn based on the experience of implementing the various project activities in the course of the past three years.

- ***Localisation and contextualisation:*** **Localisation and contextualisation of services are key to raising effectiveness of SDG**-related public service delivery at the local level, to have greater understanding of local needs and demands, appropriate selection of beneficiaries, timeliness of delivery. These are particularly important in the context of disadvantaged areas that tend to be left behind and in addressing needs of the disadvantaged people in those disadvantaged areas

- ***SDG Localisation Framework:*** Effectiveness of SDG implementation at local level can be significantly improved with help of ***SDG localisation framework***, designed jointly with participation of representatives of local administrations, local governments, local non-state actors and the media. Such a framework, as was developed under the project, was found to be very effective in singling out **gaps, pinpointing challenges and identifying solutions specific to localities**

- *Effectiveness*: Effectiveness of SDGs related services delivered at local level is raised significantly when providers and recipients have **institutionalised** structures for active and continuing engagement at local level. Experience shows that such a structure helps to implement various initiatives through follow-up activities in view of citizens' demand

- *Empowerment*: The cause of accountability in SDG delivery is best served when citizens look at services provided **not from a *beneficiary-centric approach*, but from a *rights-based approach***. However, such an approach needs to be inculcated by equipping the recipients through targetted capacity building programmes

- *Accountability*: Accountability exercises in practice are more effective and gives better outcomes when carried out with help of ***social audit tools*** and **grievance redress mechanism** as was proposed under the project

- *Bridging Data Gaps:* Availability and access to up to date data and **information at disaggregated level concerning** key local level socio-economic-poverty indicators are essential for effective delivery of public services. This helps in dealing with problems of inclusion and exclusion and avoiding duplication in beneficiary selection, timeliness of services, and ensuring overall effectiveness in delivery of services.

❑ ***Design SDG localisation framework*** for every district/upazila by following four steps:

- ➢ Problem identification

- ➢ Potential opportunities and prioritisation options

- ➢ Adoption of development agenda and action plan

- ➢ Distribution of responsibilities among government departments and non-state actors

❑ ***Institutionalise participation of citizens groups*** in local level District/ Upazila committees involved in public service delivery and SDG implementation, by promoting GO-NSA collaboration based on division of labour and responsibility (which will lead to better targetting, more reliable demand estimation, speedy delivery, more effective services)

- *Gradually move from 'Provider-Recipient' approach to rights-based approach* in view of public services delivered at local levels in a way that promotes participation and inclusion, transparency and accountability

- *Encourage the use of social accountability tools*, such as Social Audit tools developed under the project, for more effective delivery of public services. Recognition, replication and scaling up are important in this regard

- *Create a mechanism for dissemination of best practices and innovative solutions* and promote these through recognition appreciation and replication

- *Establish an up to date and disaggregated Localised Database* on key socio-economic indicators of the concerned area which will serve as a reference point for appropriate selection of beneficiaries, reliable demand estimation and timey delivery of services

Going forward: Next Steps

In the Spirit of Citizens Charter of the GoB and in light of the Annual Performance Agreement and Performance Contract introduced by the GoB

❑ **Gradually move from *Social Audit* to *Social Contract* at the local level involving services providers, elected representatives and citizens, towards implementation of SDGs in a demand-driven and Citizen-empowered way and from the perspective promoting and practicing inclusive governance in SDG localisation**

THANK YOU